

Islamophobia stops young Muslims playing bigger role in politics

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A study carried out by academics at Newcastle University and the University of St Andrews found that the majority of young Muslims in Scotland are actively engaged in politics and public life, driven by an interest in political issues at both a global and community level.

Many show this interest in a variety of ways including voting, activism, and volunteering and other charity work. For some, this was seen as a way to be positive role models for their communities, while others were motivated to respond to global issues that often incorporate negative, and often sensationalist, rhetoric against Muslims.

However, the research team found that everyday experiences of Islamophobia and racism made young Muslims anxious about participating in public life because they didn't want to appear to be overly-politicised.

They also felt that the positive contributions of Muslims to Scottish society was rarely reported by the media and that this added to the biased image of them.

Peter Hopkins, Professor of Social Geography at Newcastle University and one of the report authors, said: "The political participation of young Muslims in Scotland is largely shaped by global political issues and their experiences of Scottish politics, such as the independence referendum and debates about nationalism. But Islamophobia and negative representation in the media is damaging their confidence to play a much

more visible role in society.

"Political leaders should take the participation of young Muslims seriously as they are a politically engaged and interested group, whose resources could be drawn upon for the better of Scottish society."

A more inclusive nationalism

The research was carried out in response to the lack of in-depth research with young Muslims in Scotland about the different ways that they participate in politics, their political concerns and the barriers and challenges they encounter when engaging with political issues.

The study found that the [political participation](#) of young Muslims in Scotland is significantly shaped by Scottish politics, with many showing an interest in the possibility of Scottish independence. But for many [young people](#), there was a feeling that political parties did not communicate their policies to young people and as a result, they found it difficult to know what the different parties stood for.

Co-author of the report, Dr Robin Finlay, from the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University, added: "This research has brought up some interesting and important issues about ethnic minorities and forms of nationalism. Many young Muslims in Scotland perceive Scottish nationalism as a more inclusive and civic form of nationalism, as opposed to the type of nationalist movements we're seeing across Europe which are partly based on a divisive rejection of multiculturalism. Scottish nationalism is something that many young Muslims feel they can support as an ethnic minority as it offers a way to engage in mainstream politics."

Need for greater recognition

The findings of the study are today being presented to Tam Baillie, the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland, MSPs and representatives of young people's groups with the aim of greater recognition being given to the impact of Islamophobia on young Muslims.

Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Tam Baillie said: "Participation of young people in decision-making is one of the central rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). I'm looking forward today to hearing the views and experiences directly from the young people who took part in this important research.

"Young people in Scotland have proven to be fully engaged when they are included in political processes such as elections and the Scottish referendum. It is encouraging that that young Muslims want to play a more active role in Scottish political life, as politics should represent all young people, not just the few.

"I am heartened that despite the challenges, there are consistently hopeful messages in this report about the valuable contribution made by Muslim young people through political engagement.

"We need recognise the barriers of Islamophobia and tackle it head on to create an equal and vibrant political environment that is inclusive of all Scotland's young people."

Research published earlier this month highlighted that experiencing Islamophobia is not confined to Muslims. Sikhs, South Asians, Eastern Europeans and black young people aged between 12 and 25-years-old living in Scotland said they had been abused or victimised for 'being Muslim'.

Professor Hopkins added: "The fact other groups are experiencing some kind of Islamophobia does not take away from what the Muslim population experiences. What it does do is show the breadth of the problem and just how scapegoated Muslims have become in our society."

More information: Muslim Youth and Political Participation:
research.ncl.ac.uk/youngmuslims/

Provided by Newcastle University

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